

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJECT: NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE "THIEU SETS BACK HIS SAIGON
OPPONENTS"

1. WE HAVE NOTED JAMES MARKHAM'S BYLINED NEW YORK TIMES STORY FROM SAIGON, PLAYED BACK IN WIRELESS FILE OF FEBRUARY 13, UNDER THE HEADLINES "THIEU SETS BACK HIS SAIGON OPPONENTS." THIS PARTICULAR STORY IS AN INTERESTING EXAMPLE OF PUBLIC DISTORTION OF THE HISTORICAL RECORD INsofar AS IT PERTAINS TO OPINIONS OF THIS MISSION DESPITE THIS EMBASSY'S WILLINGNESS TO ASSIST THE JOURNALIST CONCERNED SPECIFICALLY WITH HIS STORY.

2. THE STORY (REFERRING TO CHARGES OF CORRUPTION AGAINST GENERAL TOAN) SAYS "IN A MOVE KNOWN TO HAVE CHAGRINED MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN MISSION MR. THIEU NAMED LT. GENERAL NGUYEN VAN TOAN TO HEAD THE IMPORTANT AND POLITICALLY SENSITIVE MILITARY REGION THAT SURROUNDS SAIGON." ABOUT A WEEK BEFORE THE STORY APPEARED ITS AUTHOR REQUESTED A BACKGROUND BRIEFING BY AN EMBASSY OFFICER ON CURRENT POLITICAL EVENTS IN VIETNAM. THE REQUEST WAS APPROVED IN ACCORDANCE WITH MISSION PROCEDURES AND THE BACKGROUND INTERVIEW TOOK PLACE ON FEBRUARY 7. AT THAT TIME THE THEME OF MR. MARKHAM'S STORY WAS DISCUSSED. FORTUNATELY THE EMBASSY BRIEFING OFFICER MADE A RECORD OF HIS BRIEFING WELL BEFORE THE STORY APPEARED. THAT RECORD SHOWS THAT ON THE SUBJECT OF GENERAL TOAN THE EMBASSY OFFICER TOLD THE
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CORRESPONDENT THAT "THE APPOINTMENT OF GENERAL TOAN REPRESENTED

A RESPONSE TO AN URGENT NEED FOR A PROVEN AND DEMONSTRABLY SUCCESSFUL CORPS COMMANDER TO MEET AN IMMEDIATE MILITARY THREAT." THIS IS OF COURSE EXACTLY THE TRUTH AND AT NO TIME HAS ANY RESPONSIBLE MISSION OFFICIAL (OR ANY US OFFICIAL WE KNOW OF) EXPRESSED "CHAGRIN" AT THIS PARTICULAR APPOINTMENT.

3. MR. MARKHAM'S STORY GOES ON TO SAY "IN 1972, WHEN MR. THIEU INDICATED THAT HE WAS GOING TO NAME GENERAL TOAN TO THE HIGHLANDS COMMAND, THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR. ELLSWORTH BUNKER, VIGOROUSLY BUT UNSUCCESSFULLY OPPOSED THE APPOINTMENT." THIS QUESTION WAS NEVER RAISED BY THE JOURNALIST DURING DISCUSSIONS WITH US MISSION OFFICIALS. THE AVAILABLE INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY AT THIS MISSION DOES NOT RECALL AMBASSADOR BUNKER HAVING "VIGOROUSLY OPPOSED" GENERAL TOAN'S APPOINTMENT IN 1972. ON THE CONTRARY THE AVAILABLE INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY AS WELL AS THE WRITTEN RECORD SHOWS THAT BOTH AMBASSADOR BUNKER AND GENERAL ABRAMS WELCOMED GENERAL TOAN'S APPOINTMENT TO MILITARY REGION II IN MAY 1972 PRECISELY FOR THE SAME REASON WHICH APPLIES TO HIS LATEST APPOINTMENT IN FEBRUARY 1975, I.E., HIS PROVEN EFFECTIVENESS AS A MILITARY COMMANDER IN A TOUGH SITUATION. WE WOULD HAVE HAD NO HESITATION IN MAKING THIS INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO THE NEW YORK TIMES HAD WE BEEN ASKED.

4. JOURNALISTIC FALSIFICATION OF THE HISTORICAL RECORD IS OF COURSE AN OLD STORY WHEN IT COMES TO VIETNAM. FOR THE SAKE OF THE TRUE RECORD THIS EPISODE IS REPORTED AND MAY PERHAPS BE USEFUL AS WE TRY TO RIGHT THE BALANCE.

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